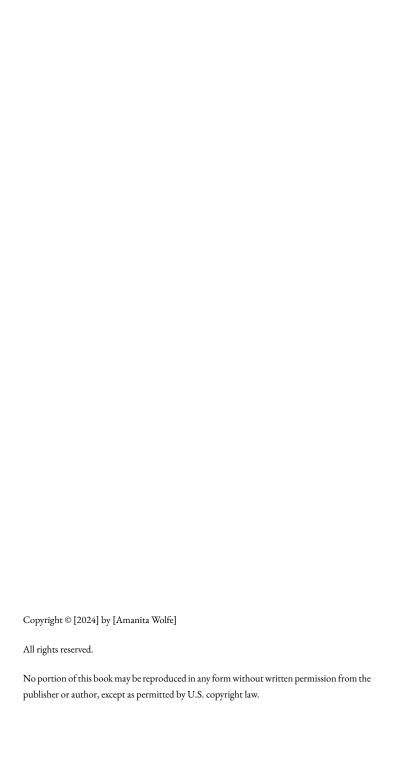


AMANITA WOLFE



## **DEATH'S WISH**

## A Short Story by Amanita Wolfe

A bright, yellow toned light was all I could see. There was nothing else around, but complete darkness. I started walking towards it, but I couldn't actually feel my legs, or any part of my body for that matter. I was unable to look anywhere else but in front of me. It was almost like I was floating towards it. The closer I got, the more it took up my field of vision. Once I finally reached it, everything around me went white. There was a small, black figure off in the distance. Confused, scared, and having no idea where exactly I was, I made my way towards it.

As I got closer, I could slightly make out the figure of a person. It seemed as so they were wearing a long, black gown that touched the floor. The bottom of the gown looked like it was smoking, twirling around. I saw this person holding a long pole with a slightly curved blade on top. I stopped in my tracks and thought about where I was going for a second.

"Where am I?" I shouted to the mysterious figure. "Who are you?"

"Come closer." the voice of a man replied to me.

I don't know what compelled me to trust this stranger with a weapon, but I started to inch forward with caution. I could make out more details the closer I got to him. I started to see that his body was not a body at all, but a skeleton. Even upon this realization, I was not scared of him. I kept moving forward until I was face to face with the man, and had a sudden realization.

"Am I dead?" I asked with uncertainty.

"Yes, but not for long. I don't get to keep you this time."

"What's going on? How did I get here?" The questions kept forming in my head. "Who exactly are you?"

The skeleton being laughed.

"Can't you tell? I am the famous Death. The one that leads you into the afterlife. But, unfortunately, like I said, I will not be keeping you long." He replied.

"Do you know how I died?"

"You were swimming in a quarry, drunk. Your friends dared you to see how far you could swim out. Unbeknownst to you, there was an undertow in the water further out near the middle of the quarry. It took you under and you drowned. Now you're here, but you should be sent back into your body in about a real world minute. Here, though, seems like an eternity."

I looked down, trying to remember my last moments. The last thing I was remembered was getting into my friend, Jack's car. I don't remember where we were heading or what else we were doing. I remember being with a few other people, though. I didn't know who they were. Probably some of Jack's friends.

"Do you have any more questions?" asked Death. "I have something I would like to tell you, if you are done."

"No, no more questions." I replied. "I think I've heard enough. What else do you need to tell me?"

"This is going to sound crazy to you.. it's even more crazy to me. But, you are the most beautiful person I have ever saw come before me. It's a shame you are leaving so soon. I've never been so captivated by someone's beauty like I have yours. I may be breaking the laws of Life and Death here, but I would like to be able to see you again."

I took a step back.

"What?" I said in disbelief. "I don't want to die again anytime soon, but thank you, I guess. I'm flattered."

"Oh, no. You won't have to die again. I have my secret ways of popping up when I please. It's really no big deal."

"Uhhhmm... yeah. I don't think I want to date Death. Seems a little.. out there for me. It's not like anybody would believe me about it, either. I don't want to be the crazy woman thinking she's dating some sort of entity not everyone even believes in."

"Oh, okay.. well, I will see you again someday."

He flicked his wrist and made a loud snapping sound. Before I knew it, my eyes were shot open in a hospital bed. I was gasping for air as I saw a doctor in front of me holding two defibrillators in his hands. I let out a small yelp in shock. My sister tore the hospital curtains aside and rushed to my side.

"Virginia!" she yelled. "Virginia! I thought I had lost you." Amber said with tears running down her face. "I'm so happy you're back. Do you remember anything that happened?"

"I... kind of." I replied. "I remember getting into Jack's car. We had been drinking. That's all I remember, though."

Amber had explained to me the exact same thing that the strange figure from my dream had. At least, I thought it was a dream. There was no way that could have been real. I've heard of people having near death experiences, and they all experienced something different of what they thought was the afterlife. I think it has something to do with the amount of DMT released in the brain when someone dies.

"I had the weirdest dream.." I trailed off. "It was about meeting Death. It's getting foggy to me now, though. I don't remember much detail anymore."

"Let's get you home," said Amber. "You'll feel better once I make you your favorite cup of tea and put on a horror movie.

I joyfully agreed with her statement. Another doctor came into the room.

"You are very lucky to be alive, Virginia." He said. His voice was noticeably raspy. "My name is Dr. Weisen. We got to you just in time. I am glad to see you are back and well. I will have a nurse come in soon to check your vitals. If everything seems normal, you are free to go back home. Just try to take it easy for the next few days, and maybe no more swimming in that quarry."

"You got it, doctor." I replied, half smiling at him. I guess I was pretty lucky to be here. The doctor left the room, and about three minutes later a woman with long, brunette hair tied into a ponytail walked into the room. She smelled faintly of jasmine, one of my favorite flowers.

"Hello!" she chimed. "I'm just going to take some of your vitals and then I will get your discharge papers ready. Sound good?"

"Sure," I said. "Go ahead and do what you need to do. I'm ready to dip out of here." I chuckled.

The nurse put a blood pressure cuff around my left arm, and a pulse oximeter on my right finger. She promptly held a no-touch thermometer in front of my forehead. Within seconds, she was done.

"Everything seems normal! Let me go get your papers and you will be on your way." she said in a delightful tone.

That was the end of that. Next thing I knew, I was getting into the front seat of Amber's baby blue convertible. There were little blue and pink stuffed animals on the dashboard. Amber had a thing for all the "cutesy" and "kawaii" stuff. It brightened up my life a bit.

"You have no idea how happy I am that you are still here. I thought I lost my only, younger sister forever." She grabbed my hand. "Let's get you home and comfy. I love you so much, Virginia."

The car ride seemed to drag on. It was only 20 minutes, but I just wanted to be home and comfortable in my bed. I looked out the window as the sun was setting. The sky was turning a beautiful pink, which reflected off the clouds that were near the sun. I sighed with contentment at the sight. When we got home, I told my sister I just wanted to get some rest. She led me to my room and even tucked me in for the night. She was so motherly towards me sometimes, especially since we lost my mother in a car wreck a few years prior. I quickly drifted off to sleep.

The colors of the sky I saw on the car ride home surrounded me as I floated in the air. It was all so surreal. It felt like I was flying through the sky. Then, I saw the same black figure I had saw in the dream I had while I was dying. I started to shift myself towards it. This time I felt my body, and I could look around anywhere. As I got closer, I could tell it was him again. Death in the flesh. Or, bones for that matter. I was a little alarmed at this point.

"Hello again," he said, smiling at me. "I told you I would see you again."

"This has to be just another weird dream. I refuse to believe you are actually an entity that is penetrating my dreams." I said with a snarky tone. There was no way this Death figure was actually real.

"Oh, but I am." he replied. "This is as real as it gets, at least in your subconscious dreamscape. Right now you are floating in a plane between the real world, and the spiritual world. This is all very real. You come here almost every night, but only recently have I met you and wanted to be with you again."

"This is ridiculous," I said. "I already told you I wasn't interested in you. Why would you come back for me? My mind hasn't changed."

"I was hoping I could change it for you, after I showed you that I am very real and I can do almost anything in the realm of existence."

Death held his hand out for me to grab. I didn't take hold of it and scoffed at him.

"What possibly could you do that would make me change my mind?" I said with a tone that meant he was obviously testing my patience at this point. "Humor me."

"You must grab my hand to see," he replied, beckoning with his hand once again for me to hold it.

Reluctantly, I grabbed his hand. Everything started to twist and turn. The colors of the sky started to warp into blackness, then everything was swirling into a black and white shade. It was like we were going down some kind of portal. Suddenly, I was in the living room of my childhood home. The television was on, turned to one of my mother's favorite shows, "The Office."

"What is this?" I asked, stepping back away from Death. "What the hell is going on?"

"Just wait a second," he answered.

My mom appeared walking from the kitchen into the living room.

"M..Mom?" I said in disbelief, voice shaking. "Mom, is that really you?"

"Yes, my darling," she said. "You've really grown up to be such a lovely, young woman. I am watching you always. Every day, you make me proud. It's so nice to be close to you again."

I turned my attention towards Death.

"What kind of sick joke are you pulling here? This is so fucked up. I want out of here now." I said with a completely disgusted tone.

"What do you mean?" he retorted. "I took you to see your mother. Like I said, dreaming is the unconscious state between the physical and the spiritual world. This is really your mother speaking with you."

"He's right, you know," said my mother. "It's really me. I'm so happy Death has brought you to me. The world has painted him to be such a bad being, when really he is just here to guide us into the afterlife. He also brings your loved ones back to you through dreams when you need them the most. He really is a kind fella." She looked at Death and smiled.

"I just can't believe this.. it's all so hard to grasp." I said with a tone of disbelief. "I love you mom, but this is scaring me." I turned to face Death. "Please, take me back. I'm ready to wake up."

"So be it," replied Death. Once again he flicked his wrist and snapped his fingers.

I shot up in my bed. I scrambled to find my phone to check the time. It was exactly 3am, which spooked me a bit. It was known that the time between 3am and 4am was the witching hour, where spirits and such were the most active. If I believed in that, why should I not believe that Death and my mother were actually in my dreams? I sighed to myself and lied back down. I decided to scroll through my phone for a bit to distract me from what had just happened. Were dreams really held in a space between the real world and the spiritual realm? I pondered a bit before closing my eyes and drifting off to sleep again. This time around, I didn't have a single dream.

I awoke the next morning with a jolt throughout my body. I felt very refreshed from sleeping for the first time in a while. Usually, no matter how much sleep I get, I always feel sluggish waking up before I have my coffee. I didn't feel like I needed it today before getting ready and heading off to work. I walked into the kitchen to greet my sister. I

really liked having her as a roommate. We've been close since we were very young, and we hardly ever fought or disagreed about things like normal siblings do.

"Hey, Virginia!" she said in a cheerful tone. "How did you sleep?"

"I had a weird dream again. I keep seeing this figure of Death. I saw him in the dream I had before I was revived as well. Other than that, though, I feel super refreshed this morning. I don't think I need any coffee."

"Wow! That's the first time I've ever heard that coming from you. Are you sure you're okay?" She questioned while reaching her hand to my forehead to check my temperature. I flinched back.

"I'm fine, I'm fine!" I replied while swatting her hand away. "I'm not 5, Amber. You don't need to be that concerned."

"Virginia," she scowled at me, "don't forget I just almost lost you. I'm just trying to look out for you."

I sighed and apologized to her. She was right, after all. I did just drown the day before.

"I have to go to work." I said, disappointingly. "It's actually crazy how they expect me to come in the day after I was on my death bed. Nobody would cover me, either. Gotta love today's capitalistic, uncaring world!"

"Love ya, Virginia. I will see you when you get home!" said Amber, as she reached out for a hug. I hugged her back and headed out the door with my work bag and keys.

The day at work was one of the longest I've ever had. It was filled with sympathy from my coworkers, most of whom I was only civil with because we worked together. A lot of them were quite younger than me, in their early 20's. Sometimes I felt like I didn't really belong there. I sat at my desk most of the day, going through the complaints that were sent in about the company, offering discounts and apologies back to the people who sent them. Sometimes the people were super nice about things and made my life a little easier. Others, not so much.. After 8 harrowing hours going through emails, it was time to clock out. I shut off my computer, grabbed my bag and headed to the door. Sweet freedom at last.

When I got to my car, the sun was already going down. The days were still getting shorter and shorter as it hadn't quite reached Winter yet, but it was still freezing and unbearable outside. Shaking, I fumbled with my keys until I got the door open. Now for the 30 minute commute back home.

I walked up to the front door, stopping to admire it like I always did. The woodwork on it was always so intriguing to me. My mother had crafted it from her bare hands and painted it a gorgeous burgundy color. It went really well with the golden knob, and the medium grey siding of the house. Every time I walked through this door, I thought of my mom and how much I missed her. The dream I had the night before flashed into my head. Was that really her? If it was, I regretted not staying any longer. I had so much to talk about with her.

After shaking that thought from my head, I turned the doorknob and headed inside to see my sister.

Amber was sitting on the loveseat with her boyfriend, Hayden, watching television in the living room.

"Hey, Ginny!" she said excitedly. "How was work?"

"Same as always. Complaints, complaints, complaints. I don't know how I keep doing this. I really need to find another job before all of my hair falls out." I said, half jokingly. My hair really was falling out from the stress I had been under from that job. I had only been there for a few months at that point.

"Well, come sit with us!" Amber said while patting the seat next to her.

"Yeah, girl. We're watching 'Scream.' I know it's one of your favorites, such a classic." chimed in Hayden.

"I'm exhausted, guys. I think I'm just going to shower and head to bed. Sorry, sis. Maybe tomorrow on my day off."

"Oh, you pooper! It's okay, I still love you." Amber blew a kiss towards me. I grabbed it and put it on my cheek.

"I love you too," I replied. I then promptly set my bag down by the door and headed towards the bathroom. After my shower, I crawled into bed and drifted off to sleep, wondering if I would have that weird dream of Death again.

Before I knew it, I was in a dark, cloudy room. It almost seemed like I was in a sauna with all the cloudiness, but it wasn't hot like one, thankfully. I started to walk forward, waving my hand around trying to get rid of some of the fog so I could see better. Then, I started floating up in the air again. As I looked up, I saw a bright light above me. I started to move towards it, like I was swimming upwards in water. I got closer and closer until my head popped through into an abstract looking room. There were colors and shapes of all sizes everywhere. I looked to my left, and I saw that familiar cloaked figured I've been seeing recently. Sighing, I floated my way towards him.

"Why do you keep coming to see me?" I asked Death. "I told you I wasn't interested. Please stop this."

"You are the most beautiful soul I have ever seen, inside and out, Virginia. I can't help it. Please, won't you just give me one chance? I promise I can prove myself to you. I will never let you down."

"And what? I only get to see you in my dreams? I never get to show you to my friends and family? What exactly are you expecting out of this?"

"Yes, it's true.. I can only come to you in dreams. I am only allowed in the spiritual realm and the space between that and real life. I know that can be a big drawback when it comes to being in a relationship. But, I can show you everything you've ever dreamed of. I can make you happy. I can change your reality as you know it." he said to me, with a bit of hope in his voice.

"Please.. in your dreams," I laughed to myself, feeling a bit witty. "How about this.. if I were the last person on Earth, I may consider it. Maybe. But, that will never happen. So good luck, Death." I replied, cynically. "Besides, you're literally a skeleton. How would we.. you know, do anything? You're all bones, no flesh."

Death smiled at me before clapping his hands together. Suddenly, he ascended into the air, spinning around. There was a twirling of black and white around him, and a sudden flash of light. He came back down, facing away from me. I walked up towards him, questioning what had just happened. Then, he turned to face me.

"How about this?" he asked, still smiling at me.

My jaw dropped to the floor. The skeleton figure that I had known as Death, became fully human right before me. A cute one, at that. Come to think of it, he looked exactly my type. His skin was an olive tone, with black hair that was short on the sides and longer at the top. His green eyes glistened at me and his thick lips continued to hold a smile.

"What.. the fuck." I said in disbelief. "How did you.. what? You had this in you the whole time, and stayed that skeleton figure up until now?"

"I didn't really think about it much until you said something," he replied. "Do you like it?"

"I mean, yeah.. but it's still not doing what you thought it would. You haven't convinced me to change my mind one bit." Death sighed. He put his head down, looking at the floor beneath him. He then lifted his head and glanced at me again. His eyes were filled with sadness, showing emotion that he was not able to do while in skeleton form. I almost felt bad for him, really. After a short moment, he flicked his wrist and snapped. I opened my eyes to see daylight shining in from my window. I yawned and sat up, rubbing the sleep out of my eyes. I didn't feel as good as I felt after waking up the day before. I felt very dreary, and all around just not well. I wondered if Death had anything to do with it before waking me up.

I got out of bed and walked into the kitchen to start making breakfast. Amber wasn't up yet, which was a surprise to me. Normally she is up before me on my days off, already in the kitchen making both of us breakfast. She was always taking care and looking after me, just like mom would. I ended up making breakfast for the both of us in an effort to thank her for everything she did. Then, I headed to her room with a tray to wake up her with breakfast in bed.

When I opened her door, I was greeted with a completely empty room. It was extremely odd to me. Amber hardly ever left the house, besides to go grocery shopping or to pick up Hayden. She was living off of government disability because of her severe mental health issues, so she had no job to go to. I started to get a little worried, this was just totally off and not like her. I pulled out my phone and dialed her number. My phone took a second to connect before the ringing came through. I started to hear her cellphone go off in her goofy little ringtone. My heart sank a little. I looked around the room, trying to hear exactly where the sound was coming from. I walked towards her bed as it grew louder, then pulled the blankets off. Her phone was

sitting right on her bed, still plugged into it's charger. I started to panic a little. Not only did Amber never leave, she never left without her phone. I started to breathe heavy as I made my way towards the back door. Maybe she was lying outside in the garden as she does that sometimes. I opened the door and saw no one.

I quickly ran back inside to grab my phone and dial 911. She was obviously missing, nothing about this was adding up. The phone rang and rang, then stopped abruptly with a message asking to please call again. I was shocked, as I have never heard of this happening before. 911 operators were always readily available, or at least so I thought. I hung up the call and dialed 911 again. The phone rang on the other line, and then the same message was played. What the hell was going on? I decided to go to the police station in person to file a report.

I grabbed my Winter coat, bundled myself up and headed out the door to my car. I pulled out of the driveway and started making my way to the station. I was soon stopped by a car that had come to a complete halt in the middle of the road. I tapped my horn lightly at them to move, or at least put their four-way lights on. They did nothing. I honked a second time, a little longer. They still hadn't moved. Frustrated, I pulled my wheel to the left and passed them, my tires screeching a bit as I slammed on the gas. I felt a little bad, I wasn't trying to be aggressive, but I was annoyed. As I passed them, I turned to look into their car. It was completely empty. Who would just leave their car in the middle of the road like that? Confused, I continued on. Not long after, I was stopped by yet another car in the road. It was the same situation all over again. The car wouldn't move, and when I passed them, it was completely empty.

I came across a car on the opposite side of the road after that, which I quickly realized was also empty like the others. I started to get a little panicky about this. It just wasn't making sense to me. Why were all these cars just left in the middle of the road? Did the town have an emergency evacuation that I somehow completely slept through? Why was my sister missing? Where did everyone go?

After weaving through cars on both sides of the road, I came to a stop outside of the police station. By this time, I had lost most of my hope that anyone would actually occupy the building. Still, I got out of my car and walked up to the front door. There was an eerie stillness to the air around me. Complete silence. It was like everyone had disappeared. I continued to open the door and walk inside the building.

"Hello?" I shouted, "Is anyone in here?" I was met with with more silence. "Hello?!" I shouted once again, only to hear nothing back.

I kept walking through the building. There were papers left on desks, computers still open to police documents. I walked over to look at one to see if I could find anything about an evacuation. There was a word document open and I began to scan it before I searched the internet for answers. The document ended abruptly in the middle of a sentence. It was like everyone just dropped everything and left.

I continued my search to get any clues by opening the computer's web browser. I typed into the search bar, "Evacuation Angola, Indiana" and hit the search button. There was nothing in the search results that indicated anything about an evacuation. My heart started beating really fast as I felt a pang of anxiety shoot across my chest. I continued

to scroll through the search results to see if I could find something, anything about what was going on in my town. There was nothing, no answers to my questions. I sat down in the chair facing the computer. My breath started to speed up and I felt a familiar panic attack coming on. I had only had a few in my life, one when Mom died, the other after almost crashing on the highway when a drunk driver swerved over the median and came towards me head on. I tried to slow down my breathing, but to no avail. I hyperventilated violently before quickly passing out and hitting my head on the computer desk.

I opened my eyes and I was in an empty, white room. I heard footsteps come up from behind, and turned to see who it was. I already knew who it was before I saw them coming. It was Death, once again, in the human form he turned into for me.

"I was wondering when you would show up again," he said with a smirk. "This time you hyperventilated until you passed out and hit your head. Are you feeling okay?"

"What is going on?" I yelled at him. "Where did everybody go? Did you have something to do with this?"

"Well," he replied, pausing for a minute. His green eyes lit up at me. "You did say, that if you were the last person on Earth, you would consider being with me."

"W-what?" my eyes widened in disbelief. "What the hell are you talking about?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;You said it yourself, Virginia."

Death waved his hand in the air and a screen appeared before us. It was a flashback of the two of us the last time I had saw him. It replayed the moment I had told him I would maybe consider being with him if I was the last person on Earth. After seeing this, I fell to my knees as tears welled up in my eyes.

"Why? Why did you do this?" I cried.

"Because I would do anything to be with you. Please, don't worry, Virginia. They aren't gone forever. I did not harm them. Follow me."

Death reached his hand out to me. I looked up at him, his eyes were gleaming with hope. Reluctantly, I took hold of his hand and stood up. His hand was soft and warm, which took me aback. I always expected death to be frigid and frail. The warmth of his hand was surprisingly comforting, which made my stomach feel a bit funny. It wasn't a bad feeling, though.

He squeezed my hand tight and pulled me forward. Everything started to warp around us again, going through that same portal-type thing we had gone through before. In an instant, I was back inside the home I shared with my sister. Amber ran out of her bedroom and into my arms, laughing with joy.

"Ginny!" she cried with happiness.

"A-Amber.. what's going on? Why are you here?" I asked, my voice shaking.

"Isn't it wonderful? Death explained everything to me when I got here. We are in the spirit realm! Come look!"

She grabbed my hand and started running. I dragged along behind her, tripping a few times before matching her speed. She led me into our childhood home, where Mother stood waiting for us.

"Now we can be with Mom all the time!" Amber said with cheer. She was way too positive about this, I thought. There is no way this is okay with anyone. I stepped back from both of them.

"You're okay with this, Amber? You are basically dead. In fact, you are dead. I'm still dreaming. I'm the only one left on the entire Earth apparently."

"Of course I'm okay with it. I know that sounds crazy, but now we can be with Mom and everyone we've ever loved! We can also be anywhere we've ever wanted and dreamed to be. Check this out!"

She clapped her hands and suddenly, we were in San Diego, a city we once visited on spring break. The sun was going down and they sky was all sorts of shades of pink and purple, orange and light blue. It was breathtaking. I couldn't believe what I was seeing before my eyes. I looked over at her, her eyes reflecting the colors of the sky. I looked back over the ocean, which was sparkling like glitter as soft, gentle waves washed back and forth the shore. I took a deep breath and smiled as I curled my toes in the soft sand. I could see my sister's point.

I clapped my hands, wanting to go back to my childhood home to be with my mom. Everything shifted, and I was exactly where I wanted to be withing mere seconds. Mom was standing in front of me across the living room. I ran into her arms and cried out loud. I was so happy to be with her again. The worries of the world slowly started to drift away from me. I turned to Death, who was still standing in the room next to my mother.

"So, what does this mean? Do I have to die to be here too? What's going to happen to me?"

"I mean, not necessarily. I didn't kill the entire world, more so took their physical bodies and brought them to the spiritual realm. After all, the spirit is still part of the body. The two are able to come here together, with a little work of a cosmic entity. It's not something I do all of the time, in fact I've only done it about twice. It was a lot of work and took a lot of energy. I won't be able to do anything that I've shown you before for a while. The magic to change scenes and appear in front of people you want is inside each individual now. You all have the powers that one gains after joining the spiritual realm."

"I guess I see what you are saying.." I trailed off. "What happens to our bodies, then? Do we age on this plane before we die, just to come back here? I'm kind of confused on that."

"There is no aging here, unless you want it. Once you have come here, you have the choice and freewill to live and be however pleases you. If you are a young child, you are able to grow into an elderly adult at will, and vice versa." Death replied to me.

"Okay, I think I get it." I said, looking up at him. His emerald green eyes looked back into mine. I started to feel sick again. I wasn't sure if I was really okay with this or not. "I think I need some time to take this all in. I give you permission to bring up my physical body so I am not the only one left on Earth, but I am going to need time to accept this."

I turned away from Death, looking back at my mom. Tears started to form in my eyes. I walked over to her and hugged her tighter than I ever did while she was still alive. She let out a sigh and squeezed me even harder. I lost my breath for a second. We stayed there for what felt like forever before letting one another go. We exchanged smiles with each other while keeping steady eye contact. For the first time in a long time, I truly felt like I was home again.

Time wasn't really a thing in the spiritual realm, but I'm sure a lot of it has passed since the world basically ended and I arrived here for good. Death still chases after me daily, and I've started to take a liking to it, though I won't admit that to him for a while. I guess I am really making him work for it after what he did to Earth. I am slowly becoming more accepting to what has happened, and one day I will give Death a real chance. I allowed him to take me on a few dates so far, taking me to some of the most beautiful places I've ever seen on Earth. I'm impressed by it all, honestly, but continue to keep my distance. I guess I want to remain somewhat of a mystery to the man for as long as I can.

After all, it's Death we're talking about. One of life's greatest mysteries, chasing after another mystery? Kind of comical, if you ask me.